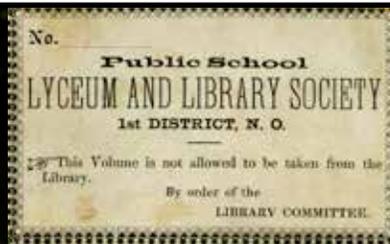


# History of the NEW ORLEANS PUBLIC LIBRARY



WITH ORIGINS dating back to 1843, the New Orleans Public Library has grown from a single French Quarter house with a few volumes into a city-wide system serving all of Orleans Parish with locations spread across the City. The Library has a long and rich history of serving the public by providing access to a wide range of educational, informational, and recreational materials, programs, and activities for all ages.



# 19<sup>th</sup> Century

**1843** Wealthy merchant Abijah Fisk leaves his house, at the corner of Customhouse (now Iberville) and Bourbon streets to the City of New Orleans, “on condition that it shall be applied to the keeping of a library for the use and benefit of citizens of said city, and to be used for no other purpose.”

**1854** A catastrophic fire destroys the Mechanic’s Institute building and its contents, including the collection gathered by Alvarez Fisk and B.F. French. The structure would be rebuilt, and new books purchased.

**1881** The Mechanic’s Institute building is purchased by the University of Louisiana, which also unofficially assumes responsibility for the collection of books that remain in the library.

**1883** The University of Louisiana becomes Tulane University.



**1895** Tulane University asks the City for permission to move the Fisk Collection to its new campus on St. Charles Ave. Instead, Mayor John Fitzpatrick proposes that the City Council merge the Fisk Library and the City Library in order to create a free public library to be housed in St. Patrick’s Hall on Lafayette Square, recently vacated by Criminal District Court.

**1847** Abijah’s brother, Alvarez Fisk, purchases a substantial collection of books from bibliophile Benjamin Franklin French and places them in the house on Customhouse Street with the intention of carrying out his brother’s wishes. However, he and other supporters of a library are unable to secure additional support from the City.

**1852** With Alvarez Fisk’s approval, city officials decide to allow the Mechanic’s Society to house the Fisk collection. The books are moved into the Society’s new building on Philippa Street (now University Place), and the library finally opened to the public with a collection of books valued at some \$10,000.<sup>1</sup>

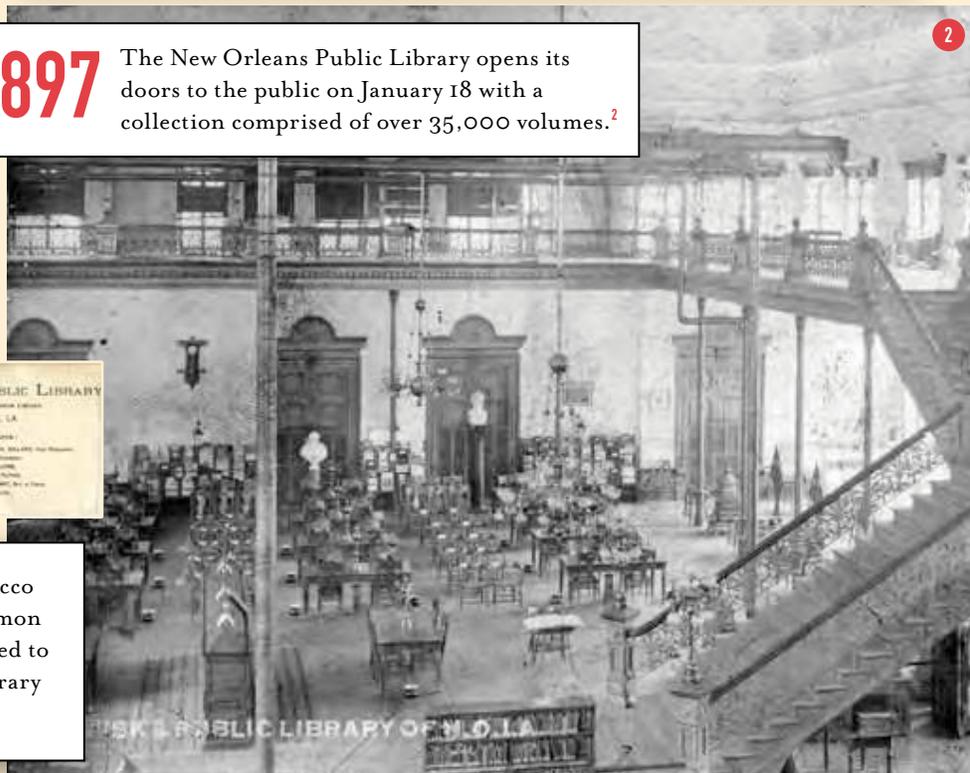
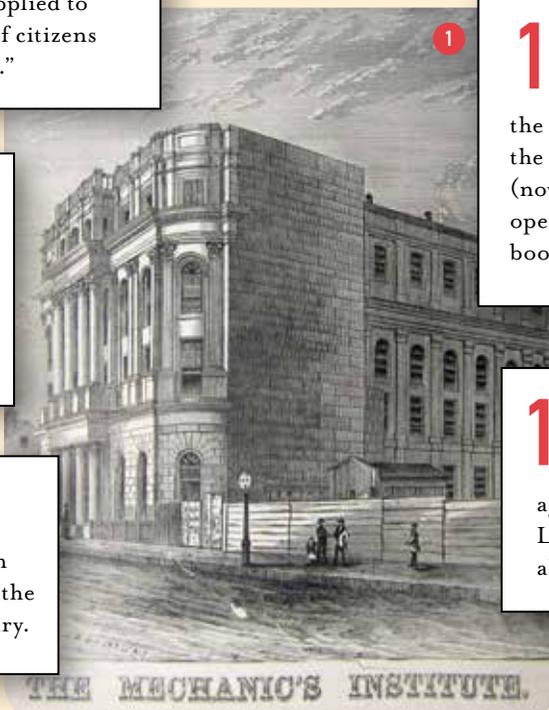
**1882** Satisfied with the University’s custodianship of the collection, the City agrees to formally allow the University of Louisiana to administer the Fisk Library along with its own collection of books.

**1896** The City Council accepts Fitzpatrick’s plan and passes Ordinance No. 12,217 CS, “establishing a public library in the City of New Orleans, and providing for the management of same.” It is called the Fisk Free and Public Library, until a few years later when it becomes known as the New Orleans Public Library.

**1897** The New Orleans Public Library opens its doors to the public on January 18 with a collection comprised of over 35,000 volumes.<sup>2</sup>



**1898** The heirs of tobacco manufacturer Simon Hershheim offered to donate \$50,000 to the new library in their father’s memory.<sup>3</sup>

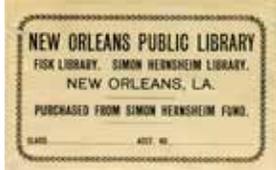


# 20<sup>th</sup> Century

## 1902

• The City accepts the Henshaws' generous donation and the gift allows for an immediate purchase of \$10,000 worth of new books. The remaining money is invested and, in years to come, the interest from the Henshaws Fund allows the Library to continue to enhance its collection.

• The Library receives a grant from Andrew Carnegie for \$250,000 to be used to build a new Main Library and three additional libraries, the Royal Library, the Algiers Point Library, and the Napoleon Library.



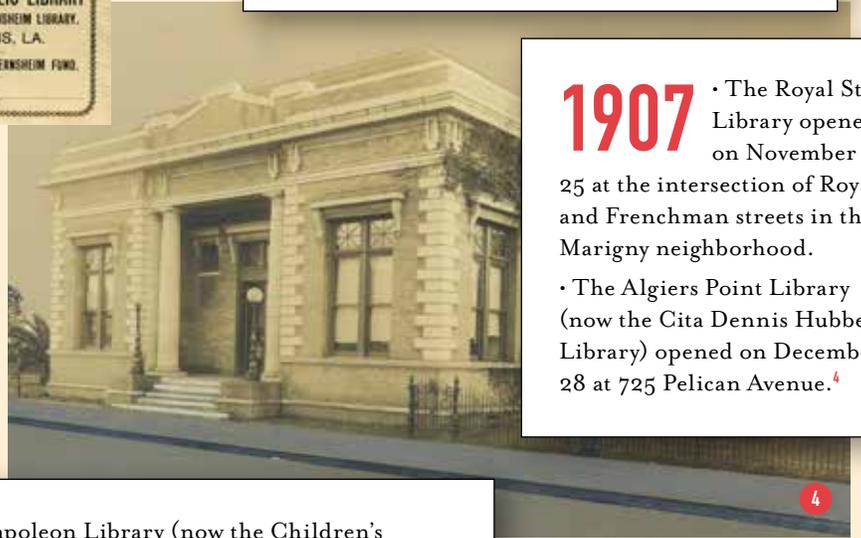
## 1906

The Library relocates temporarily to quarters in a private home at 1115 Prytania St.

## 1907

• The Royal Street Library opened on November 25 at the intersection of Royal and Frenchman streets in the Marigny neighborhood.

• The Algiers Point Library (now the Cita Dennis Hubbell Library) opened on December 28 at 725 Pelican Avenue.<sup>4</sup>



## 1908

• The Napoleon Library (now the Children's Resource Center Library) opened on January 31 at 913 Napoleon Avenue near the intersection of Napoleon and Magazine streets in the Uptown neighborhood.

• The Main Library opened on October 15 at Lee Circle.<sup>5</sup>

Public Library, New Orleans, La.—117



The Board of Directors of the New Orleans Public Library cordially invite you to be present at the ceremony attendant on the opening of the Main Library Building, Corner St. Charles and Howard Avenues, Saturday, October Thirtieth, Nineteen Hundred and Eight, Eight A. M.



## 1915

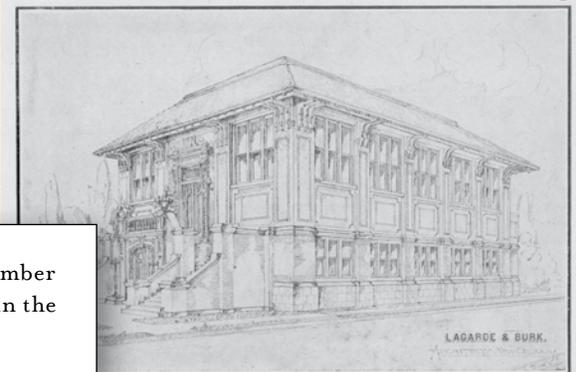
The Dryades Library opened on October 23 near the intersection of Dryades and Philip streets.

This location served as the only library for African-American patrons from its opening until the construction of the temporary Branch Nine in 1946.



## 1911

The Canal Library opened on August 26 near the intersection of Canal and Gayoso streets.<sup>6</sup>



## 1930

The Nix Library opened on November 29 at 1401 S. Carrollton Avenue in the Carrollton neighborhood.<sup>7</sup>



# 1940

• The Alvar Library opened on November 7 at 913 Alvar Street in the Bywater neighborhood.<sup>8</sup>

• The Library's first bookmobile began traveling the streets of New Orleans and continued to do so for the next forty years, serving areas far removed from Library locations. In late 1979, after several years of declining use, the Library Board voted to eliminate this service.

ALVAR STREET BRANCH  
NEW ORLEANS PUBLIC LIBRARY



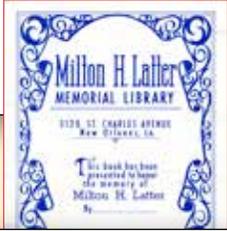
# 1946

• Branch 9 temporarily opened at the Valena C. Jones Elementary School on June 12 at 1901 North Galvez Street in the Seventh Ward. When school resumed in the fall, Branch 9 moved into two converted army surplus huts on a vacant lot at the intersection of St. Bernard Ave. and N. Prieur Street. This location was the second African-American only library until all libraries were desegregated in 1954.<sup>9</sup>

• City Archives are transferred to the New Orleans Public Library.

# 1948

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Latter purchased the mansion at 5120 St. Charles Avenue with the intention of transforming it into a public library as a memorial to their son, Milton, who lost his life at Okinawa during World War II. The Latters purchased the mansion for \$100,000 and donated \$25,000 for alterations. The City spent an additional \$15,000 converting the mansion into a library. The City formally dedicated the building on October 31.<sup>10</sup>



# 1949

The Norman Mayer Library opened on March 27 at 3001 Gentilly Boulevard in the Gentilly neighborhood. The Norman Mayer library was constructed with a portion of a \$250,000 bequest of Mrs. Norman Mayer in memory of her husband.<sup>11</sup>

# 1954

• The Broadmoor Library opened on April 4 and was located on Washington Avenue. This was the first air conditioned public library in New Orleans.

• The Nora Navra Memorial Branch Library was dedicated on May 2. This library was made possible by a donation from Nora Navra, an unmarried homemaker who frequented the Napoleon Library and who died in August 1946. Miss Navra left a major portion of her estate to be divided equally among the American Red Cross, Touro Infirmery, and the New Orleans Public Library. The Library Board used the donation of \$15,181.63 to purchase the lot adjacent to the temporary Branch 9 library and to build a permanent library location in the Seventh Ward.

• All Library facilities were desegregated in 1954 under the leadership of Rosa F. Keller, the first female Chair of the Library Board, shortly after the Supreme Court's historic Brown vs. Board of Education decision.<sup>12</sup>



# 1956

The Robert E. Smith Library opened on April 8 at 6301 Canal Boulevard in the Lakeview neighborhood. This library was named for Mr. Robert E. Smith who donated the land for the building.

# 1957

The Friends of the New Orleans Public Library was created to provide the Library with volunteer and financial support.



# 1958

• The Main Library at Lee Circle closes and reopens at 219 Loyola Avenue on December 15.<sup>13</sup>

• The Canal Library closed.



# 1965

• The Royal Library was severely damaged during Hurricane Betsy and was demolished. Today, the site is occupied by the Christopher Inn, a senior housing facility operated by the Archdiocese of New Orleans.<sup>14</sup>

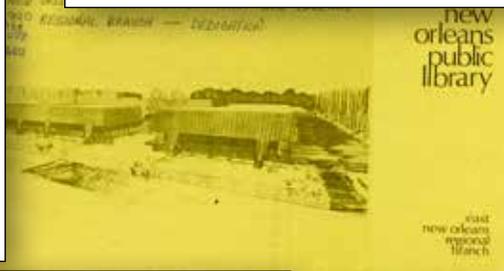
• The Dryades Library closed due to damage by Hurricane Betsy. The building is now the Dryades YMCA.<sup>15</sup>

# 1966

The Algiers Regional Library opened on April 19 at 3014 Holiday Drive. This was the first of three regional branches built during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>16</sup>

# 1968

The East New Orleans Regional Library opened on October 23 at 5641 Read Boulevard. This library brought six day a week service to the area and became the largest branch library location.



# 1981

The Broadmoor Library was closed due to the building's significant structural problems.

# 1986

\$700,000 from the Library budget was redirected to the City's general fund to help cover shortfalls in other agencies. Due to the budget issue the Library Board was forced to order the closure of all library branches. The Business Council of New Orleans and the River Region donated \$350,000 to keep the branches open. The Business Council also led a campaign to pass a dedicated 4-mill property tax which was approved by public vote passed by a 75% margin, which became the Library's primary source of funding.

# 1993

The Broad Library (now the Rosa F. Keller Library & Community Center) opened on November 19 at 4300 South Broad Street. Over 300 people attended the dedication of the library which blended the old and new in a way that preserved the integrity of the Hardie-Fattel House and included an efficient and modern library building.

# 1995

• The Martin Luther King Library opened on October 14 inside the Martin Luther King School located at 1611 Caffin Avenue in the lower ninth ward.<sup>17</sup>

• The Library's website nutrias.org was launched, one of the first public library websites in Louisiana. The site was created and maintained by Wayne Everard and Irene Wainwright from the Louisiana Division/ City Archives.<sup>18</sup>



# 1997

• The African American Resource Center opened as a reference division that offers a variety of resource materials on the African experience in the Americas.

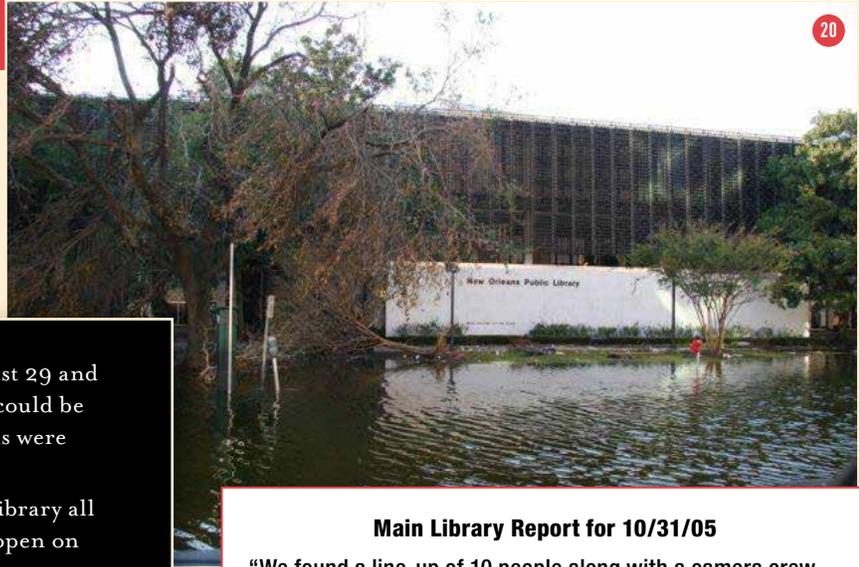
• The Broad Library was dedicated as the Rosa F. Keller who was the first woman appointed to the Library Board of Directors and who held that position for twenty-six years. Of Rosa Keller's many important actions as a board member was her successful campaign to desegregate the libraries.<sup>19</sup>



# 21<sup>st</sup> Century

**2003**

The Algiers Point Library was rededicated as the Cita Dennis Hubbell Library in honor of the work that was done by Mrs. Hubbell to ensure that Algiers Point always had a library.



20

**2005**

• Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans on August 29 and all library locations were closed until damage could be assessed and repairs made. Six library locations were completely destroyed and 90% of library staff were laid off.

• The Cita Dennis Hubbell Library, Main Library, and Nix Library all received only minor wind damage and no flooding and all reopen on October 31.<sup>20</sup>

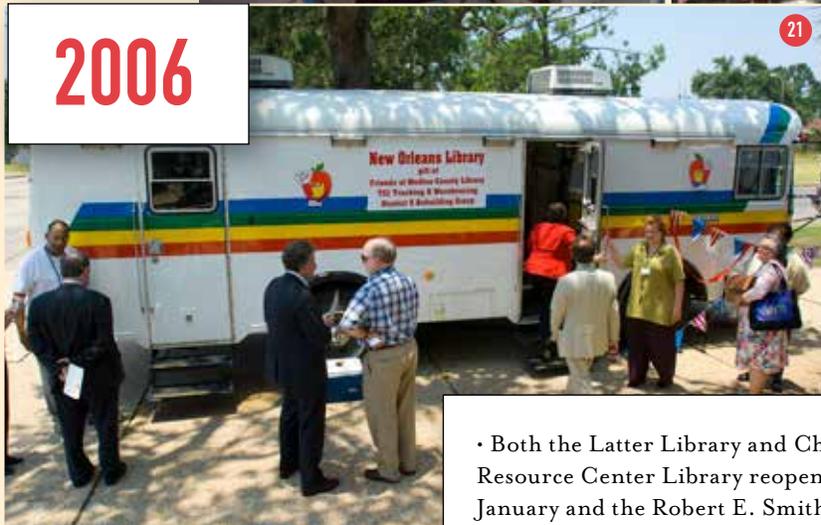
### Main Library Report for 10/31/05

“We found a line-up of 10 people along with a camera crew from MSNBC waiting for us to at the front door when we reopened. Among our first patrons were a young woman and her two-year-old looking for children’s books. We were surprised and delighted to see children in the library on our first day back in business. It felt good to be back.”



20

**2006**



21

• Both the Latter Library and Children’s Resource Center Library reopened in January and the Robert E. Smith Library is provided service via a bookmobile.<sup>21</sup>



• A major renovation of the Children’s Resource Center Library was completed in June.<sup>22</sup>



22



23

• The Alvar Library was flooded during Hurricane Katrina, receiving about a foot of water. It was renovated and reopened in June.<sup>23</sup>



23



24

• The Algiers Regional Library begins temporary operations out of a trailer in June.<sup>24</sup>

# 2007

• The new Mid-City Library opened at 330 N. Carrollton Ave. on June 11.<sup>25</sup>

• The East New Orleans Regional Library temporarily opens in the Einstein School in December.



25

• The Martin Luther King Library reopened in October after renovations from major flooding during Hurricane Katrina.

# 2008

• The Cita Dennis Hubbell Library closed for renovations in May and was temporarily relocated to the Algiers Courthouse Carriage House.

• The Algiers Regional Library temporary building opened in November and both the temporary buildings of the Robert E. Smith and Rosa K. Keller libraries opened in December.<sup>26</sup>



26

# 2009

The East New Orleans Regional Library moved from the Einstein School to a temporary building in October.<sup>27</sup>



27

# 2010

• The Norman Mayer Library temporary branch opened at 2077 Caton St. in July.  
• A new location, the Central City Library, opened in the Mahalia Jackson Childhood and Family Learning Center on November 15.

# 2011

The Mid-City Library reopened at 3700 Orleans Avenue in February.

# 2012

The rebuilt Rosa F. Keller Library & Community Center and Norman Mayer Library reopened in March. The rebuilt East New Orleans Regional Library opened in April and the rebuilt Algiers Regional Library opened in July.<sup>28</sup>



28

28



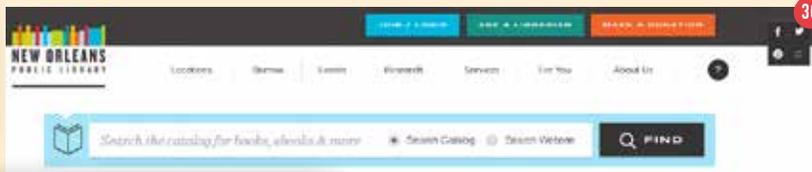
29



# 2015

The five larger newly rebuilt libraries that re-opened in 2012 required significant hiring and operational expenses which required the Library to utilize its reserve funds to maintain its level of service. The reserve funds were expected to be depleted by 2016 and library service would have to be cut without additional revenue sources. A 25 year 2.5 mill supplemental tax proposition was put before a public vote and passed by a 75% margin.<sup>29</sup>

2016



The library website is redeveloped with a new design and web address, [nolalibrary.org](http://nolalibrary.org).<sup>30</sup>

After an extensive period of input collection from the community and staff, a three year strategic plan is developed.

REFOCUS  
+ TRANSFORM



In December, the Mid-City Library relocated to 4140 Canal Street in The Automotive Life Insurance Company Building. Built in 1963, the mid-century modern gem was designed by Curtis & Davis Architects who also designed the Superdome and the Main Library.<sup>31</sup>



2017

The NOLA Library App launches allowing for easy and portable access to the Library's digital resources.<sup>32</sup>

32



33



Library outreach vehicles hit the streets of New Orleans to promote and extend library services at community events, early childhood and senior centers, and summer camps.<sup>33</sup>

Groundbreaking on the new Nora Navra Library building took place in March. Once the Nora Navra Library reopens, all six libraries destroyed during Hurricane Katrina will have been rebuilt.<sup>34</sup>

34



2018



The Nora Navra Library celebrated its Grand Opening with a two-day celebration that began with a ribbon cutting on August 24.<sup>35</sup>

In 2018, New Orleans celebrated its tricentennial. The Library participated in the celebration through programming including a yearlong New Orleans 300 series and exhibits.

1718-2018

300 New Orleans

Celebrating Our History & Culture

2019

The Central City Library at the Mahalia Jackson Learning Center closes on September 27.

Pop-Up Service begins on October 7 at the new Central City Library location at the Allie Mae Williams Multi-Service Center. The center is named after a former head of the City Department of Health.

Electronic Culture Passes which provide access to local cultural heritage institutions become available. This updates the previous physical system which began in 2015. The new system allows more patrons to enjoy these partner institutions.

2020

The Central City Library officially opens to the public at the Allie Mae Williams Multi-Service Center with a Grand Opening Celebration on March 6. The new location features increased access and additional hours.<sup>36</sup>

